1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

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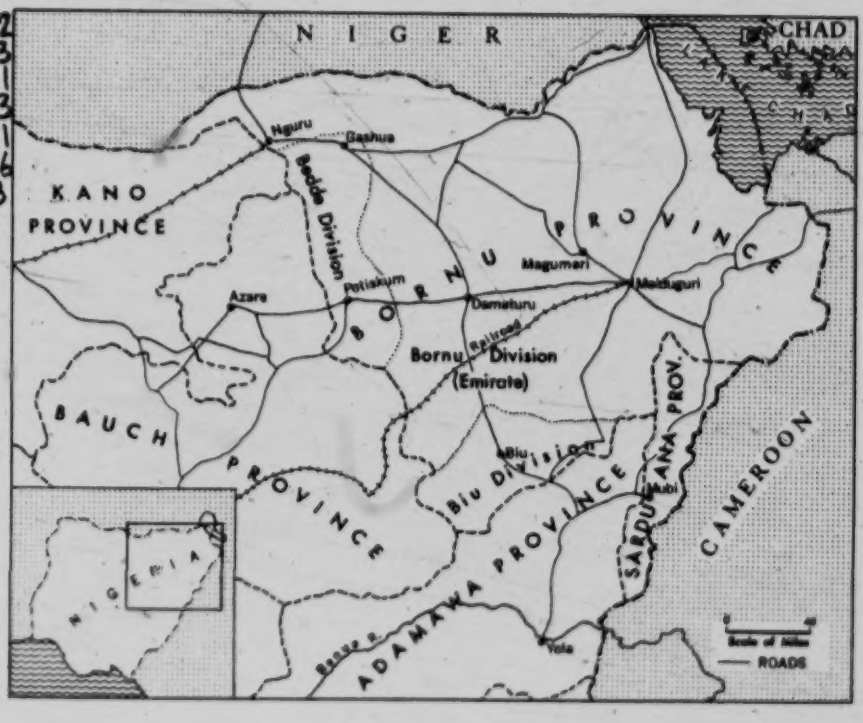

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1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

Geidam in the north, where another anthropologist, Abraham Rosman, and his wife were working. Discussions with Dr. and Mrs. Rosman helped all of us to see many of the unique features of Kanuri life that stemmed from our particular towns as against more general Kanuri patterns of behavior that were widespread throughout the society. We also became acutely aware of the kinds of variations that could occur across communities as they varied in size, ethnic composition, and quality of the political leadership. At the end of the first field trip, my wife and I spent three months in the capital city of Maiduguri looking at government reports and district notebooks, and acquainting ourselves with many of the special activities that characterize courtly life at the center of the emirate.

In 1964 and again in 1965 I returned to Bornu. On my previous visit the country had been a colonial holding of Great Britain, now it was part of the independent nation of Nigeria. My task in this second visit was to gather statistics on marriage and on divorce rates. But it also gave me a chance to see old friends, and catch up on what had been happening locally since my last visit seven years earlier. Some changes were readily apparent. A large number of deep wells were sunk all over the province, and these now provide enough water for a greatly expanded livestock population. Everywhere the cattle are healthier, fatter, and above all much more in evidence. They block roads and are seen herded in large numbers to and fro wherever one wanders over the countryside. Furthermore the people are less afflicted by parasites because the deep water is uncontaminated, as much of it was not during my first visit. There is now a large modern abattoir and a ground-nut oil refinery in the capital city, and in late 1964 the Nigerian railway finally pushed through to Maiduguri to connect the Bornu capital with Nigeria's national railway system. On the other hand, detailed questions about various traditional practices indicated that there have been few changes at the cultural and social level. At the political level where there were English District Officers and other officials of the regional government, now these posts are filled by Nigerians, generally from other parts of northern Nigeria. However it is for the most part correct to use the present tense in describing Bornu, and when this is not true I will attempt to mention the special circumstances that have brought on the changes.

Magumeri, our home for seventeen months in 1956 and 1957, sits on top of one of the ridges of Bornu, and there is a steep climb onto it from the motor road that travels along the bottom of the ridge for most of the year. During the rains, the road runs along the sandy top of the ridge, to keep clear of the large muddy areas formed at the ridge bottom. Magumeri includes approximately 2000 people about half of whom live in surrounding hamlets within the boundaries of the village area. It is a district capital and thus has a two-room primary school, a court house, and the large compound of the district head who administers twenty-one village areas, containing 50,000 people, living in an area of approximately 850 square miles. The village has a weekly market on Sunday, and is divided up into a number of wards under the village area head who is also the political leader of its surrounding hamlets and officially the political subordinate of the district head. Except for the fact that it has a somewhat lower proportion of non-Kanuri compared to most others, Magumeri is a "typical" Bornu village in terms of its size, occupational ranges of the population, and influences it receives from the capital and the world beyond the emirate. Indeed this is why I chose to spend most of my time

101 This study was carried out among the Kanuri people of Bornu Province, Northern Nigeria. The writer and his wife were in Nigeria from August, 1956 until October, 1957. Almost all of that time was spent in the town of Geidam, in the northern part of the province.

A. Geography

131 1. Major geographic features.

Bornu Province is in the northeastern corner of Nigeria. It is bounded to the north by what was then Niger Territory, French West Africa (now the independent Republic of the Niger). [133] To the east lie the marshy shores of Lake Chad and, south of the lake, Cameroons, trusteeship territory administered as part of Bornu Province. The Yobe River, largest of the rivers flowing through Bornu into Chad, forms the northern border of the [161] province for much of its length. Maiduguri, the provincial capital, population 56,740, lies roughly in the geographic cen- [491] ter of the province. The main road through the province runs from Jos through Maiduguri and then on to Fort Lamy in Chad. [496] The railroad barely penetrates into Bornu, running from Kano and ending in the northwest tip of Bornu at Nguru, the second largest town in the province.

133 Bornu is a huge sandy plain, contrasting sharply with the rugged country of the Bauchi Plateau, which rises steeply to the southwest. South of the plain is the hilly area of Biu which is in Bornu Province. The flat plain extends eastward,

[text continues on p. 3]

633 cause it lies on the main highway connecting Ft. Lamy with Jos.
131 Nguru, in the northwestern corner of the province, is the second
491 largest city in Bornu, and is particularly important because it
• [496] marks the end of the rail line extending from Lagos via Jos.
Geidam is strategically located so that it benefits from trade with both. (see Figure 1) Unpaved roads connect Geidam with Nguru, directly east, and with Maiduguri, to the southeast. It would be about 130 miles from Geidam to Maiduguri if one went by the shortest possible route. The road leads directly south from Geidam, however, and then directly east, and the total dis-
131 tance covered amounts to 170 miles. Though distances are great
49 and the condition of the roads is very poor, trade is dependent
438 on trucks which are the life-line of the country. Goods come into Geidam by truck from both Maiduguri and Nguru. They are then distributed throughout the countryside by merchants and tradesmen, using camels and donkeys to transport their goods.
[366] Since no roads at all lead north into Niger and the Kanuri villages north of Geidam, nor do roads lead east along the Yobe River to the villages and towns there, Geidam is an important regional center of trade and commerce. Its geographic location is therefore an important factor in determining the nature of the community.

B. The Physical Nature of the Community.

491 The road from Maiduguri joins that from Nguru a few miles
[366] west of the town (see Figure 3). The sole road connecting Gei-

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3: Cohen E-4.5 (1956-1957) 1960 M814 Kanuri M514 ●
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